

October 26, 2021

**Halloween**

In the early 1950’s - when I was fourteen years old – an uncle of mine gave me a book for my birthday. It was titled “Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural.” (It was a big step up from the Hardy Boys and Chip Hilton.) My mother looked a bit askance at it, but I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. So did my younger brother. Since then, I have had a life-long fascination for these kinds of stories (the genre). Therefore, it should almost go without saying, “I like Halloween!”

I have been amused as I have watched what has happened to the observance of Halloween during my lifetime. It has moved from being basically a children’s day to now being the second largest holiday observed in our country (from a financial standpoint). A few years ago, I read a statistic that 170 million people participate actively in the celebration of Halloween and spend an average of eighty dollars per person. I’m sure that today these numbers are much larger. We are not talking about children but adults, many of whom decorate their house with outside lights, frightening displays, and scary music.. Retailers love it! But it does beg the question: What is going on here?

Theories abound and, as you might guess, I have one. I think (and I am serious about this) that the popularity of Halloween represents in some sense the breakout and hunger of the human spirit which refuses to be contained. What is being expressed is a need for the supernatural!

I will explain that statement by talking about the Enlightenment which began to dominate thought in the 17th century. It was marked by the ascendancy of reason and scientific method. Its “quest” was to give humanity a rational, ordered world with defined limits. No superstitions! No heaven or hell! No angels or demons! Its guiding axion was: All propositions about the world must be proven with observable evidence.

But as you might expect, the imaginative minds of many human beings refused to be contained within the ordered, reasoned world constructed by the new science. There occurred a counter-movement in the history of thought called the Romantic reaction. It emerged most noticeably in Art, Music, Literature and Religion.

My remarks about Romanticism are constructed around the idea that human beings have very definite, deep seated spiritual needs which cannot be repressed. Next week I will continue this discussion by talking about particular works of art and literature which are expressions of Romanticism. To be continued. . . .

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